



United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am pleased to respond on behalf of the Administration to your request for views on H.R. 3159, which proposes the establishment of a "crisis management council" within the Department of State for the purposes of (1) studying causes of international unrest, and (2) making recommendations to the President and the Congress regarding crisis prevention and crisis management.

The Administration appreciates Congressman Bennett's interest in ensuring that the Executive Branch pay close attention to the interrelated tasks of analyzing causes of international unrest, providing warning of possible crisis, crisis prevention and, if necessary, crisis management and resolution. We also appreciate the need for close consultation between the Executive Branch and Congress in matters involving the Nation's security.

We believe, however, that the primary functions and responsibilities of the proposed "crisis management council" are addressed by existing bodies and procedures within the Executive Branch. In addition, this Administration has undertaken or supported initiatives that would serve many of the same objectives of the proposed council -- the first and foremost being to reduce further the risk of war between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The proposed council, to the extent that it would duplicate existing bodies and procedures, would not be a cost-effective use of taxpayers' dollars. More importantly, if the council were to assume an active role in crisis management and resolution -- as the bill implies -- we believe this could seriously complicate existing mechanisms at the very time when a rapid and well-coordinated response by the United States Government would be most critical.

The Honorable
Dante B. Fascell
Chairman,
Committee on Foreign Affairs,
House of Representatives.

- 2 -

Our specific comments on H.R. 3159 follow:

- The proposed council function of "studying political, economic, and military happenings and anticipated happenings which may lead to international crisis or unrest" already is served by various offices within the Department of State.

The Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), working in coordination with other agencies of the Intelligence Community, helps to provide policymakers with in-depth analysis of international developments as well as warning of possible crisis. INR also participates in studies of crisis management techniques that may be useful for avoiding and, if necessary, managing and resolving an actual crisis. The Secretary of State, in addition, can call upon the regional bureaus and the Policy Planning Staff (whose membership includes academicians with expertise in international relations) for long-term studies and policy options that may be recommended to the President.

- The crisis prevention, management, and resolution functions ascribed to the proposed council already are performed by several agencies working closely together. These include the White House and National Security Council, the operations centers of the Department of State and Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Military Command Center. In this context, the Reagan Administration is working to improve bilateral communications between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. that could prove vital in avoiding or resolving a serious incident or conflict. For example, as a result of an Administration initiative, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. agreed in July 1984 to upgrade the capabilities of the Hotline that serves as a direct communications link between our respective heads of government. The U.S. also has proposed the establishment of a Joint Military Communications Link to complement the Hotline channel with a government-to-government link for the exchange of information that may be helpful in crisis avoidance or resolution, but the Soviets so far have refused to discuss the proposal.

- 3 -

- H.R. 3159 states that the proposed council will make recommendations to the President and the Congress in order to ". . . manage and reduce (an international crisis) should it occur." The language, while vague, implies that the Congress would have a role in crisis management beyond the existing mechanisms and traditions of close consultations with the Executive Branch. The Administration believes such a provision would represent an unwise and possibly unconstitutional diminution of the responsibilities of the Executive Branch in the day-to-day conduct of foreign policy and the defense of the Nation.
- H.R. 3159 states that the President should extend an invitation to the Soviets to meet jointly with the council at least once every three months and suggests that similar invitations could be extended to other nations. The U.S., however, is already an active participant in several multilateral organizations (e.g., the United Nations) whose objectives include the peaceful resolution of international problems. In addition, in his speech last May to the European Parliament, the President reiterated his call for regular high-level exchanges between U.S. and Soviet military leaders to develop better understanding and to prevent potentially serious incidents from occurring. The Administration believes that such initiatives to improve practical communications and exchanges would, if accepted by the Soviets, prove more beneficial and would fulfill the function proposed for the council.
- The membership of the proposed council -- civilian, government officials, or a combination of the two -- is unclear. The Administration notes, however, that there exists a broad spectrum of private research and academic institutions with expertise in crisis management techniques, and many of these maintain close contact with the Departments of State and Defense and other agencies. Moreover, the Administration is working with Congress to implement legislation establishing an Institute for Peace that would perform studies and conduct training to help resolve international conflict by means other than military force.

- 4 -

The Office of Management and Budget advises that from the standpoint of the Administration's program there is no objection to the submission of this report.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

William L. Ball, III
Assistant Secretary
Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs